

A Pragmatic Study on the Functions of Discourse Marker *You Know* in Economic Magazines

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Abstract

You know has a high frequency in English communication and it is mainly used as a discourse marker. People use it in many different contexts and occasions, and hereby it fulfills various pragmatic functions. Understanding these functions and usages can help English learners to participate better in communication by improving the expression and interpretation of the discourse between the speaker and the hearer. We have retrieved *you know* in authentic use from the financial magazines collected in Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and analyzed the pragmatic functions of discourse marker *you know* based on the relevance theory. This research has identified five pragmatic functions that *you know* fulfills: information modification marker, turn shifting marker, attitude marker, mitigator marker and advising marker.

Keywords: Discourse marker, Pragmatic function, COCA, Financial magazine

1. Introduction

In our communication, a series of words, phrases and clauses frequently appear between sentences, such as the 3 following sentences:

(1) “*Well*, I must endure the presence of two or three caterpillars if I wish to become acquainted with the butterfly.”

(2) Eph thought about that. “*You know*, I’m not sure she ever really tired”

(3) “No. *Well*, he hasn't paid his bill yet. *I mean*, I don't think he's gone. We will keep you posted when we see him.”

If the word *well* and the phrase *you know* and *I mean* in the above sentences were removed, the literal meanings of these sentences will not be changed, but still this will influence the effects of the language conveyed to the receivers. In English, there are many words, phrases

and clauses which are relatively syntax-independent and does not change the truth conditional meaning of the sentence, and have a somewhat empty meaning (Moder, 2004), like “*well*”, “*you know*” and “*I mean*” in the above sentences, are called discourse markers. In the study of discourse markers, many terminologies have been used to refer to them, such as “cue phrases” by Knot and Dale (1994), “discourse particles” by Schourup (1985), “modal particles” by Abraham (2001) and “pragmatic particles” by Ostman (1995). In spite of different names and definitions, “discourse markers” is the most commonly used term and is of general acceptance.

Although discourse markers frequently occur in daily communication, traditional grammar isn’t suitable to be used in analyzing them. As a dispensable part of syntactic structure, and without any contribution to the propositional meaning, discourse markers are not a core element of grammar. On the other hand, they are an important key by which speakers can tell hearers the relations between discourse segments and by which hearers can infer the intentions hiding in speakers’ utterances.

As discourse markers are usually used in verbal communication and dialogues in written books or plays, linguists didn’t pay much attention to them in the earlier time. Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1987) pointed out that those frequent qualifiers play no role in the grammar structure and expressing information from the perspective of syntax, but they often occur not only in our oral communication but also in the communication in Shakespeare’s plays (or even earlier) (Svartvik, 1980). However, not until the late 1970s, when the generation and interpretation of utterances drew scholars’ attention, did discourse markers become the focus of linguistic studies. In 1977, when Labov and Fanshel talked about one usage of *well*, they used the term “discourse marker”. After the 1970s, with the development of pragmatics, discourse markers began to be taken as one field of linguistics. In Levinson’s book *Pragmatics* (1983), it says that discourse markers are a component of discourse deixis, and “there are many words and phrases in English, and no doubt in most languages, that indicate the relationship between an utterance and the prior discourse. Examples are utterance-initial usages of *but*, *therefore*, *in conclusion*, *to the contrary*, *still*, *however*, *anyway*, *well*, *besides*, *actually*, *all in all*, *so*, *after all* and so on. It’s generally conceded that such words have at least a component of meaning that resists truth-condition treatment. What they seem to do is indicate, often in very complex ways, just how the utterance that contains them is a response to, or a continuation of, some portion of the prior discourse” (Levinson, 1983). In the 1980s, Scholars, such as Schourup (1990), Schiffrin (1987), Blakemore (1987, 1992, 1996, 20021), Fraser (1980, 1990, 1996, 1998, 1999) and Redeker (1991), have built the theoretic foundation for the study of discourse markers. In 1990s, more and more linguists stepped further, and systematic frameworks for studying discourse markers have been set up since then. In the latest three decades, discourse markers have been studied by many scholars. Nowadays, Researchers regard these previous inconspicuous words and phrases as a tool to interpret discourse.

In this paper, there are 5 sections in total. The first section is the research introduction. The second section will introduce the corpus selection and research method. The third section will display the distribution of the discourse marker *you know*. The fourth section will

discuss the findings.

2. Methodology

2.1 Corpus Selection

Since the 17th century, due to the influence of empiricism, language studies began to attach importance to the observation of natural occurrence of the corpus. A large collection of external language data, namely texts and corpora, was used to help to analyze some linguistic phenomena objectively. To the 19th century, people began to try research methods of the natural sciences into the language studies to make the study of language into a real science. They collected a large number of language data, described them, and reconstructed the phylogenetic relationships between languages, which sets up the beginning of the modern linguistics (Teubert & Cermacova, 2007). In the 1960s, because of the impact from Chomsky's theory, corpus studies were substituted by the introspection research studies. But in the meantime, the first machine-readable corpora appeared. As a result, corpus officially entered the electronic age. In the 1960s, during the development of corpus study, along with the appearance of electronic and machine readable corpus, the using of corpus started to increase. In the late 1990s, corpus study started to develop rapidly, gradually penetrating into all areas of language study (He & Peng, 2011). With the development of the technology, a large quantity of information now is able to be stored in computer, and the system processing power is strong enough to handle big data, hence linguists are interested again in the study based on a corpus. Now the use of corpus is widespread.

The word "corpus" is formed from Latin which means "body". It refers to any texts in both spoken and written form. But in linguistics, it's used to refer to a large collection of texts that can be regard as the sample of a particular range or use of languages encoded in machine-readable form. The definition of corpus can be quoted from two persons' words: Richard defines corpus as "a collection of materials that has been made for a particular purpose, such as a set of textbooks which are being analyzed for their linguistic features" (Richards, 2000, p138). Kennedy defines corpus as "a body of written text or transcribed speech which can serve as a basis for linguistic analysis and description" (Kennedy, 2001, p56).

Corpus as a research tool has its own obvious advantages. Compared with the intuition-based study, corpus-based study is out of the influence from personal factors, and thus is more objective. Intuition-based study may lead to a partiality to one or some aspects and ignore the others. What's more, corpus is formed from authentic texts, and machine works impartial to process these texts. Corpus has the ability to handle a large amount of data without making mistake, which is time-saving and efficient while intuition-based study can only handle a small collection of texts but can't avoid man-made accident.

2.2 Data Collection

COCA, as a large public corpus with a huge text resource, has its unique advantages. Large number of words from diversified genres can provide an overall view for researchers to analyze their research objects. Different from other corpus, such as the American National

Corpus, the British National Corpus and the Oxford English Corpus, the words of COCA from different genres are evenly chosen. Researchers can easily find out the frequency of a word or a phrase, and make a comparison between the frequencies of different words and phrases, or between the frequencies of a word or a phrase in different genres. Diachronic researches from 1990 to 2012 can be also realized by choosing the years which researchers want to find.

In this thesis, the “financial magazine” section in COCA is used as corpus to help to analyze the pragmatic functions of discourse marker *you know*. In this thesis, the first step of data collection is to find out the frequency of *you know* as a discourse marker in financial magazine. The author searched “*you know*” in COCA in the “MAG: Financial” genre, and excluded sentences containing *you know* as non-discourse markers. Then samples with *you know* used as a discourse marker have been screened out manually, and discourse marker *you know* has been classified into different categories according its functions.

2.3 Research Method

Both quantitative and qualitative analysis are applied in this thesis.

Quantitative method refers to the study based on corpus. This thesis adopts statistics from COCA. By observing, counting and classifying the statistics, linguistic features will be analyzed. Several charts and examples are shown to specify the objective statues of the research object, and the typical usages of the discourse marker *you know* occurring in natural communication are chosen as the examples to provide clear explanations and instances for theoretical analysis.

Qualitative analysis is often applied to the description of the variation, distinction and commonplace of the existing linguistic features which can be find in the charts or examples. Therefore, this thesis will use qualitative analysis for the pragmatic analysis of the typical characteristics summarized based on the data. Combining the data analysis and relevance theory, the different functions of the discourse marker *you know* are concluded.

The quantitative analysis provides an overall view of the study and objective data which can make the study more reliable and convincing, on the other hand, the qualitative analysis provides the theoretical support which can make the study more academic and profound. Joining the two methods together can avoid the shortage of each side, and makes the analyzing process more comprehensive.

3. Distribution of Discourse Marker *You Know*

In this section, based on the search result from COCA, classification and analysis of the pragmatic functions of discourse marker *you know* are conducted by examples taking. In the data description section, the research data is presented and makes a preparation for the following classification and analysis. The research questions are answered during the detailed analysis.

3.1 Data Description

In total, there are 438 samples in which *you know* have been found, as shown in screen shot 1. The author has counted the number of discourse marker *you know* from these 438 samples, then the frequency of *you know* as a discourse marker can be calculated.

Table 1. The numbers You Know found in MAG-Financial section of COCA

Word/Phrase	Tokens 1
YOU KNOW	438

By the manual screening, 213 samples containing *you know* as a discourse marker have been found. Discourse marker *you know* takes 49% of the total samples, which nearly equals to the half of the corpus chosen.

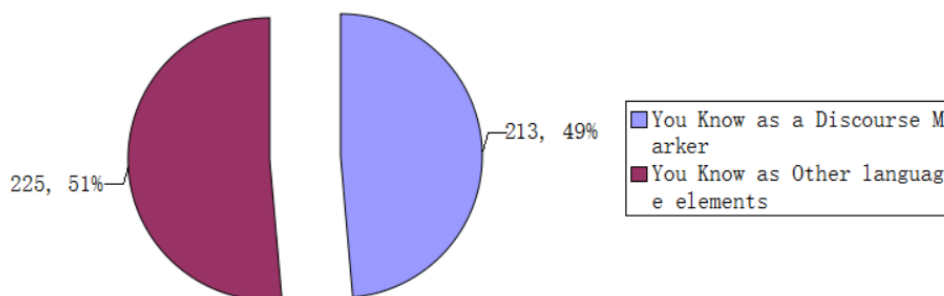


Figure 1. The percentage of DM You Know in Corpus

3.2 Classification of Discourse Marker You Know

During the study process, discourse marker *you know* has been classified into 5 different categories according to its pragmatic functions shown in communications and utterance appeared in the financial magazines. Below is the table of the data collected and calculated.

Table 2. Numbers and frequencies of different categories of You Know

Category of <i>You Know</i> as a Discourse Marker	Number	Frequency
Information Modification Marker	71	33.0%
Turn Shifting Marker	56	26.0%
Attitude Marker	42	19.7%
Mitigator Marker	31	14.6%
Advising Marker	13	6.1%
Total	213	100%

In the Table 1 above, the “frequency” is the frequencies of different categories of discourse marker *you know* in the total 213 sample. From the table, we can see that in financial magazines, there are 213 out of 438 *you know* used as discourse marker, which takes 48.6% of the whole. And the other 51.4% of *you know* are mainly used as subject-predicate component in sentences, attributive clauses, subject clauses or interrogative sentences.

In financial magazines, *you knows* in 71 samples are classified to the category of information modification marker, which is 33.0% of the 213 pragmatic uses of *you know*, are placed in the middle of the sentences, the information conveyed in discourse segments after it are usually the supplement or amendment for the discourse segments before it. 56 *you knows* are used as turn shifting marker in these samples, taking 26.0% of the total number. This marker has different functions in different positions: if it's at the beginning of a discourse, it's spoken to show the intention of bidding the floor; if it's in the middle of a discourse, it's used to maintain the speaker's right to speak; and if it's putted at the end of a discourse, it shows that the speaker is giving up the bid. There are 42 *you knows* used as attitude markers, accounting for 19.7%. The information in the discourse segments after it are usually the speakers' real attitudes and feelings. Of 213 pragmatic uses of *you know*, 31 are classified into the mitigator marker, accounting for 14.6%. *You know* as a mitigator marker is often applied in the face-threatening situations to mitigate the interpersonal relationship between both sides involved in communication. Advising marker takes the smallest percentage, only 6.1% discourse marker *you know* are used in financial magazines. Their existence in the communication is to make the speaker's suggestion more acceptable and less offensive.

These categories are concluded from the observation and analysis of the 213 samples, the detailed analysis process with example demonstrating is presented in the next section.

4. Pragmatic Analysis of Discourse Marker *You Know*

As mentioned above, the understanding of discourse marker *you know* can't be constrained in its semantic meaning. Its functions will not be realized until it's put into a certain context. In different contexts and different pragmatic presuppositions, discourse marker *you know* has different pragmatic functions. In the following analysis, the pragmatic functions of discourse marker *you know* are discussed based on the framework of relevance theory, and from the perspective of conversational interaction and cognitive inference. The specific examples for each function from COCA are picked up and analyzed below.

4.1 You Know as a Discourse Information Modification Marker

From the view of the collected corpus, *you know* can promote hinting the changes of the discourse information, including serving as information repair marker, addition marker and insufficiency marker.

The process of discourse generation is dynamic, and meanwhile speech understanding is also a dynamic process. The hearer's purpose is to joint the new information and his or her own information together, and then find the relevant information generated from the discourse and the cognitive context. In order to reduce the time for the hearer to understand the utterance, the speaker will use discourse markers and other linguistic methods to guide the hearer's

attention, which can maximize the effect of the discourse context. *You know* sometimes will lead a discourse segment that differs from the meaning of the foregoing, and it's in order to show the information which has not been previously mentioned, suggested and estimated, which does not comply with the information appeared in the subsequent utterance or will change or amend the former utterance. *You know* in such situations often contains the meaning of transition. Look at the following examples:

Example 1

- “A lot of people go on vacation, look at real estate fliers and suddenly decide they want to buy a house,” says David Hehman, CEO of Escapehomes.com. “On the other hand, *you know*, from your primary home's market, real estate is not the no-brainer investment it once was.

In the first example, the information following discourse marker *you know* is not mentioned in the utterance before it. The speaker tells the fact that people on vacation can be easily attracted to buy houses in the first part. But in the second part, he changes the information created by him in the beginning and he expresses the message that the local house market is not easy. The two parts are opposite to each other. In order to make the hearer be able to follow his transition, he uses discourse marker *you know* to inform the hearer to combine the cognitive context with his utterance together and thus creates an opposite fact in the mind of the hearer. To guide the hearer to transfer his or her attention onto the latter information, the speaker uses *you know* as a marker to bridge the opposite information in the context.

Example 2

- Jimmy Hoffa: I believe that the nest egg required to render retired life tolerable is no less than... \$50 million, *you know*, which is only \$25 million after taxes.

The second example shows that the speaker, at the beginning says that the price of “the nest egg” is 50 million dollars, but his following utterance conveys the information that the price will become 25 million dollars after taxes. He maybe has forgot to tell the price after taxes in the first place and then for some reason he recalls it, so he tries to add the latter utterance, which is an amendment for the former. And *you know* here joints the two segments together in order to correct the speaker's information or remind the extra information.

Example 3

- “A lot of this stuff is routine,” observed Dr. Georges Benjamin, executive director of the American Public Health Association.” You need to ask questions like, ‘Do you smoke? Do you have abdominal pain?’ If you ask a core amount of questions at every visit and the answer is no, when the answer is yes, *you know*, to spend time on that problem - even though the patient may have come in for something else.”

The third example shows that the speaker, Dr. Georges Benjamin, confidently believed that the answer to the questions would be no, but later, he put forward an assumption that the answer would be yes, which didn't comply with what he believed. If there was no further repair for his utterance, the hearer would impossible to interpret his words. To prevent such

result, he used *you know* as discourse marker to introduce the information that more problem would come if the answer was yes, which again made the hearer come to the relevance that “the answer is no”.

For successful communication, the speaker will leave no stone unturned to clearly express their meanings. Speakers often use discourse markers to show that they will add new information to, or make some further explanation for the previous utterance. In such situation, the discourse segments after *you know* usually express the same or similar information as the segment before it. Take the following sentences as examples:

Example 4

- “If she's going to borrow more than her starting salary is likely to be, *you know*, she's headed for trouble.”

In this example, the utterance after *you know* are spoken to tell a new information to the hearer that the action said in the foregoing is “a trouble for her”. The foregoing utterance in this example expresses the assumption of “borrowing money”. If the speaker simply says the assumption without the mention of “trouble”, the hearer may not understand his intention to know that “borrow more” is troublesome for “her” but only gets the information that “she” needs to borrow money. While in this example, the speaker uses *you know* to introduce the latter utterance, which makes the context of this sentence very clear to the hearer. *You know* here enhances the relevance between the two segments. The utterance “she's headed for trouble” add a further information for the first part.

Example 5

- “In the next few years it will lose U.S. patent protection for four blockbuster drugs with combined sales of \$3 billion or so. *You know*, that's a huge disaster for most people, but that doesn't really matter for a company with annual revenues of \$35 billion.”

In the above example, the sentence led by *you know* makes a further explanation for the utterances before it. In this discourse, “huge disaster for most people” is an explanation for “3 billion dollars' loss”. In fact, in this example, what the speaker tries to say is that “3 billion dollars' loss is not a big deal for a company with annual revenues of \$35 billion”. In order to create the contrast to the hearer, the speaker need to first lead the hearer to believe this is a huge disaster, so he uses *you know* to guide the hearer to follow his intention, and successfully makes the hearer believe “the loss is huge” according to the cognitive context and this discourse marker.

Different from the common sense of relevance theory, in a specific context of the conversation, sometimes out of a certain reason, the speaker will deliberately omitted certain information, or be unwilling to carry out a clear statement for a situation, or not want to directly explain to the other party. Discourse marker *You know* may suggest that the information provided by the speaker has "overtones and implication."

Example 6

- “Will only drinks white wine now because of that really weird evening drinking martinis with that slightly older, kinda-like-a-snake famous art dealer who said he would introduce her to Jasper Johns and just got her drunk so that he almost got her to, *you know...*”

In this example, the speaker is narrating the fact that “Will only drinks white wine now”, and when he tries to tell the cause of this fact, he deliberately leaves out the words after “got her to”. From the words existing in this discourse, such as “only”, “kinda-like-a-snake”, “drunk” and “almost”, which is easy for the hearer to feel the attitude of the speaker displayed in the context, and according to the speaker’s cognitive context, he or she can feel that the whole thing is embarrassing. So when the speaker leaves out the words, the hearer will have an assumption that it’s not honorable and even shameful. Discourse marker *you know* confirms the assumption of the hearer and implies that what the hearer guesses is right.

Example 7

- Jobs was describing what he saw circa 2000: “The company was increasingly dependent on mega-retailers -- companies that had little incentive, never mind training, to position Apple’s products as anything unique. It was like, we have to do something, or we’re going to be a victim of the plate tectonics. And we have to think different about this. We have to innovate here.”
- “The leap into retail, though, would be from a standing start.” We looked at it and said, “this is probably really hard, and really easy for us to get our head handed to us, *you know...*”

In this example, there is an interaction between Jobs and “we”. Jobs was requiring “us” to make some changes and innovation to avoid the possible coming crisis. Based on the context here, they were talking about changing their distribution channel into direct retail by themselves which was a new channel and a challenge with risks. But “we” had to give a reply to Jobs’ requirement. His desire to make changes was strong and this guided us to give him a positive answer, but on the other side, we couldn’t be sure whether this new channel would go on well or not, so an absolutely positive answer should not be given either. In such dilemma, “we” chose to say: “this is probably really hard, and really easy for us to get our head handed to us, *you know...*”. According to the whole article, to accomplish Jobs’ requirement, “we” found the best retail executive Mickey Drexler to set up “our own retail channel”, the omitted content should be the condition of setting put new distribution channel. There is nothing following the discourse marker *you know*, which implies the intention that “we” did not and could not give an absolute answer. The reason we needed to omit it on purpose lies in that the conditions of our positive answer was too complex.

4.2 *You Know as a Turn Shifting Marker*

In a communication, if all the people speak together or listen together in the same time, the continuation of the communication will be impossible. Communication is a process that the parties involved constantly shift their roles. As what Levinson (1983) has said: “we obtain an A-B-A-B-A-B distribution of talk across two participants”. Turn-taking is the mechanism to decide which one should speak and which should listen. Many studies have shown that

discourse marker *You know* has a monitoring function on communication turn. It specifically plays a role of governor in the aspect of floor-bidding, floor-maintaining and floor-relinquishing. Some discourse markers are used as the device of turn-taking, and one of them is *you know*.

When discourse marker *you know* is applied in the floor-bidding process, it's usually situated at the initial position of a discourse to show the speaker's aim of saying something.

Example 8

- Gore cuts in, a mildly alarmed look on his face. “*You know*, all of these technologies are going to play a role,”

In this example, we can find the “cuts in” movement of the speaker, which demonstrates that the speaker Gore bids the floor during the conversation. If an abrupt interjection is put into the utterance of the other side in the communication, that will be rude and annoying. So to make the floor-bidding process more easily and peacefully, speakers will tend to choose discourse markers as an introduction for their upcoming utterance. In example 8, Gore puts discourse marker *you know* in the front of his utterance and suggests that he is going to talk.

When discourse marker *you know* is used in the floor-maintaining process, it's usually placed in the middle of a discourse. It works as a tool for utterance delaying and helps to earn enough time for the speaker to organize his or her utterance behind it. In such situation, *you know* is a marker to tell the hearer that the present utterance is not finished yet. It's an important means of maintaining the existing turn.

Example 9

- Insana: Not everyone agrees with you. What do you think created these “swirls” that have caused so much turbulence in business and on Wall Street?
- Immelt: Bad business cultures, Ron. *You know*, nothing is ever going to protect investors from bad business models that don't work, whether it's energy trading or the dotcom phenomenon.

In this dialogue, Insana asks Immelt the question about the cause of “swirls”. Immelt takes the turn and answers her question with “bad business cultures”. But in fact, Immelt has not yet finished his words and he is going to talk about the bad influence brought by bad business cultures. To avoid overlapping in the communication, he inserts the discourse marker *you know* between his answer to Insana's question and his further comments on “bad business cultures”. By using this discourse marker, he implies that there is something more he wants to speak, and the hearer will understand his intention and keep listening.

However, if *you know* is used at the end of the discourse, it marks the end of an utterance. The speaker means to convert the turn, waiting for the hearer's response, such as “That why I ended the contract with him, *you know*”. But sometimes the hearer may not accept the right to speak, or through hedges like *uhuh* and *mhm* to give feedback or by other forms of expression such as facial expression and eye contact.

Example 10

- After six weeks the fine lines were gone and her skin was smoother. “It’s doing something good for you. It’s almost like going to the tanning booth, but better, *you know*” she says.

In this example, the speaker is a customer who used the new tanning machine of a company. She was speaking as an interviewee. The interviewee was telling the interviewer that the tanning effect of the new machine on her skin was good. After her expression, she decided to relinquish the floor. Discourse marker *you know* in this example is used as a hint to tell the hearer that she has finished talking and the speaking right can be exchanged.

To sum up, discourse marker *you know* can be used in the initial, middle or final positions of a discourse, they play a regulatory role in the communication turn. From the perspective of conversation interaction and cognition, no matter in which position discourse marker *you know* is, the functions of it can be interpreted as the stimulation or guide of the speaker to help the hearer's understanding and reasoning of the discourse. Since the process of discourse understanding and the process of discourse creating are carried out simultaneously, the appropriate use of discourse markers can help both the speaker and the hearer to create an optimal communication mechanism, thus to ensure the smooth conducting of the communication. In fact, this is the concrete application of relevance theory during the communication

4.3 *You Know as an Attitude Marker*

Linguists generally believe that discourse marker *you know* does not affect the truth condition of discourse, but can express the attitudes or emotions towards the contents of proposition. For example, Svartvik (1979: 173) believes that the contexts in front of and behind discourse marker *you know* have a close connection and it can reflect the agreeing attitude, positive reaction or high emotion. While Schiffrin (1987: 102) summarizes the findings of some linguists and points out that *you know* is usually linked with opposition, rejection and denial. Although the two linguists have different opinions on the discourse marker *you know*, their descriptions have something in common - *you know* is connected to the speaker's attitude.

Example 11

- Interviewer: Did you struggle to foster the illusion of size and experience?
- Cosor: We didn't actually lie. We just, *you know*, let people draw their own conclusions.

In this dialogue, the interviewer is asking Cosor, an upstart in New York City, if he and his partners were fostering illusion of their company, which is absolutely very hard for Cosor to reply him honestly. Cosor will get trouble to admit the truth directly, so he says: “We didn't actually lie”. But on the other side, he knows that the fact is obvious and his lie will be exposed by the interviewer and annoys readers, so he adds the second sentence which is just an excuse. Making the excuse can also make him feel embarrassed, he hereby uses the discourse marker *you know* to relieve some of his feeling by guiding the interviewer to his excuse slowly.

Example 12

- We would meet the project's sponsors in the hallways, and they would ask: “how things were going?”
- We would say: “Well, fine, *you know*, we're still working on it.”

In example 12, the two sides involved in the conversation are the project sponsors and the narrator. When the sponsors asked the situation of the project, the narrator answered “fine”. Taking the context into consideration, we can have a clear idea of the situation that the project goes on slowly. The intention of the narrator was to tell the sponsors that everything is fine, but the first part of his answer is “Well, fine”. The discourse marker *well* shows the hesitation of the narrator’s answer and the sponsors could easily interpret this fact. So to comfort his sponsors and to show his positive attitude, he used *you know* to guide the sponsors to “we’re still working on it”, which suggested that the project was still been carried on.

4.4 *You Know as a Mitigator Marker*

In verbal communication, both the hearer and the speaker need to make efforts to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships, i.e., try to be polite. The so-called politeness is realized through taking some measures to give face to the speaker himself/herself or the other party. Brown and Levinson (1987) believe that many languages have a face-threatening behavior possibility. Thus, in the verbal communication, people will choose certain means to meet the need of face-saving, and discourse marker *you know* is one of the means, the proper use of it can play a role in personal relationships regulation.

During verbal communication, there often occur such situations: the speaker’s opinions or views differ with the hearer’s, or the request of one side is rejected by the other, or the speaker’s utterance is offensive. These situations mean that the speaker’s or the hearer’s face will be threatened, then people need to make efforts to ease the intensity of the threats in consideration of politeness and interpersonal relationship. In the 1980s, Fraser introduced terms such as mitigation and mitigator into pragmatics (Fraser, Bruce: 1980). From the functional perspective, the role of mitigator is to regulate relationships, and to lower the degree of face-threatening, which is closely related with Brown and Levinson’s proposition of face-threatening acts. It’s found that there are a lot of structures of language or words in the verbal communication which play a role in mitigation, *you know* as a discourse marker is one of these mitigators that can have an impact on human relations. So how can discourse marker *you know* act as a mitigation marker? How can it lower the degree of face-threatening? Sperber and Wilson’s relevance theory proposition provides a new perspective for the analysis of this phenomenon. For example

Example 13

- You can then come back to the broker and say: “*You know*, I like your idea, but I'm concerned about this, this, and this.”

In example 13, the speaker tells the interviewer how to reject the proposal from the broker,

i.e., the request from the broker. When a speaker puts forward a request, it means that he or she assumes the other side has the ability to satisfy the request, or have the ability to meet the conditions of the request. However, in this example, the answer of this speaker conflicts with the request from his broker. He indicates that he does not want to accept the proposal. In this case, the discourse of the broker can't be used as the background assumption of the optimal relevance for understanding the discourse of the speaker, then the broker needs to make some adjustments on his contextual assumption in order to catch up with the development of the communication. And discourse marker *you know* is used to mitigate the embarrassment brought by the rejection from the speaker.

Example 14

- “Last year, we had people who came up and said: ‘*You know*, I didn't realize that you guys were doing anything.’ Swear to God. People really thought we were out of business.”

In this example, Robert A. Iger, Disney's president, is talking about their depressed situation “last year”. Most people thought that Disney had been closed, so when they came to his company, they found the company was still running. To express their expectation that Disney collapsed would threat the hearer's, i.e., Robert's face. Robert's believed that his company was still working, but the speakers' words would bring a new and opposite assumption to him. This could easily make him annoyed or embarrassed. The context assumption of them was not relevant to the cognition of Robert, so they needed to find a way to bridge this gap. The use of *you know* adjusted the interpersonal relationship that would possibly be destroyed by the words spoken by the speakers.

4.5 *You Know as an Advising Marker*

During communication, the intentions of the use of discourse markers by speakers can be various. In the above sections, the intentions can be used to change or repair the information, communication turn taking, to express the speaker's attitudes and feelings, and to mitigate the face-threatening. And sometimes, in the communication, the speaker tries to persuade or give some suggestions to the hearer. Giving advice directly may give an impression of arrogance and offense. In another situation, when the suggestion given to the hearer does not meet his or her thought thoughts, the speaker perhaps will make the conversation unhappy. To avoid such situations, the speaker usually will apply some special methods to express his or her advice or persuade the hearer, and seen from the perspective of relevance theory, discourse markers can be a sign to imply the hearer to adjust his or her cognitive assumption. Based on the observation of the corpus, *you know* also has such function.

Example 15

- Then Weill chimed in: “He needs to learn how to reach out to a broader range of people. It was just hard to have that happen.”
- Back to Reed: “If I had known the first day of the merger what I know now” - he did not expand on that - “*You know*, I think we could have used Jamie differently, and in so doing maybe not run into the problem. You know what? Mergers are hard. In a merger, the skills of getting along with people are much more important than just your personal professional

skills.”

In this dialogue, the background is that the company’s merger plan encountered huge setback because of the unskillful management of the HR executive Jamie. A member of the board Weill thought the problem here was Jamie hadn’t received enough training and experience, so his intention was to keep Jamie in her present position. But the CEO Reed thought differently, he thought Jamie should not have been put into this position during the merger. To debate with the board about whether the choice of Jamie as the HR executive was right or wrong was risky. After Reed said the first sentence “If I had known the first day of the merger what I know now” which was actually unfinished, he realized he could not say directly that he was not satisfied with the nomination of Jamie directly. And at the same time he also wanted to suggest that Jamie should not be put in this position any longer, which was opposite to Weill’s opinion, so he ended his first topic and began to give a mild suggestion. He chose discourse marker *you know* to guide the board to his intention that Jamie should be replaced and thus provided an opportunity to extricate Weill from the awkward position and shifted the cognitive assumption of the board from Weill’s discourse to his.

5. Conclusion

This paper concentrates on the study of discourse marker *you know*. The theoretical framework of this study is relevance theory. The data and research transcript is retrieved from the Corpus of Contemporary American English. After the analysis of discourse marker *you know*, both speakers and hearers can have a clear understanding of the discourse marker *you know* and its functions in discourse generation and interpretation.

Based on the framework of relevance theory and data of financial magazines collected in Corpus of Contemporary American English, and from the perspective of conversational interaction and cognitive inference, five pragmatic functions of discourse marker *you know* have been discussed. This long overlooked “pragmatic particle” can display various pragmatic functions instead of grammatical functions in different contexts. Discourse marker *you know* has no effect on the truth condition and it doesn’t participate in the construction of basic semantic meaning or propositional meaning. However, it works like a marker or a sign with abundant pragmatic effects. In the process of understanding discourse, *you know* can indicate context, connect discourses and lead the hearer to interpret the discourse towards the real intention of the speaker, which plays a “route marker” role in the discourse interpretation from the partial or from the whole view.

The scope of this study was limited in terms of the corpus used. Only the Corpus of Contemporary American English is used to retrieve data of *you know* and hereby the findings are limited to the American English. Future studies can retrieve data from the British National Corpus to examine the functions of *you know* in British English.

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